

[A Hell Hole Farmer]

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SOUTH CAROLINA WRITERS' PROJECT

LIFE HISTORY

Title: A HELL HOLE FARMER

Date of First Writing March 31, 1939

Name of Person Interviewed Mr. Johnny Haselton

Race White

Fictitious Name Jimmie Green

Address Shulerville, S. C.

Occupation Farmer

Name of Writer Charles A. Von Ohsen

Name of Reviser State Office C10- 1/31/41 - S.C.

Project 1655

Charles A. Von Ohsen

McClellanville, S. C.

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Life History

Hell Hole Swamp lies between McClellanville and Monoks Corner, South Carolina. This swamp divides into many branches which cross the road many times. The tall cypress trees and water oaks cluster together as though each one was trying to get it's full share of the water. The water is black in color and runs in a meandering trail over old logs and cypress knees. On the outer edges of the swamp are little patches of cleared land that breaks the solid masses of pines.

There are many old roads that wander around in every direction, eventually leading to a little store, where every one in the community makes his weekly purchases. These people seldom see each other except when they meet at the store. Of course there are a few who visit outside of this section, but most of them have never been further than Charleston. Many have never been to a movie and have never seen nor ridden on a train. There is no bus line through this section so most of the people have to be contented just to stay at home since they have no automobiles to travel in. This isolation has a tendency to make them live as their fore-fathers did. Mr. Jimmie Green, who is seventy-six years of age, was born in the Hell Hole region and unlike many of the people of this community gets a great deal of amusement out of the name.

He lives in a four room frame house. The living room floor is covered with a congoleum rug. The furniture consists of a buffet, sewing machine, a 2 victrola on a table, and five or six chairs. On the walls are many enlarged photographs, with snapshots stuck in the corners. Over the door are two helmets which two of the sons wore in the World War. Besides the living room there are three bed rooms in the main part of the house and on a wing, a combination kitchen and dining room. The house though poorly furnished is immaculate.

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In the yard is an old grindstone suspended between two oak tress, and an old-fashioned well with the curb made of a hollowed-out log. There are a few rose bushes, but no other shrubbery.

This is the story Mr. Jimmie told me:

"I like to live here. I am not bothered with any of the evils that you find out in the rest of the world. Here we are away from the cities and highways, with their gambling joints, liquor stores and such. We live a peaceful life here, where all of the families are good, honest, poor people. We still have to use oil lamps and bathe in wash tubs, but we don't mind that for we never have had anything else. We don't have fine houses and cars, but none of us have them, so it doesn't worry us at all. We visit each other on Sundays and help each other in time of trouble or sickness, and to my mind that is a sight better than not even knowing who your next door neighbor is.

"Now I am seventy-six years old and in bad health, so I'm not able to work, but there was a time when I worked from sun to sun. The first money I ever made was for chipping boxes. I got fifty cents per thousand, and I could 3 chip eight or ten thousand a week. I got along pretty good in those days for you could buy so much more for a dollar then, than you can now. After I got older I started farming, planting cotton mostly. There was money in cotton then. I cleared seven or eight hundred dollars a year then. It was during this time that I put three thousand dollars in the bank for mine and Alice's old age, but the bank closed and I lost it all.

"I used to hunt deer, turkeys, and wild hogs a lot, but now I'm not even able to do that. There's no telling how many deer I have killed during my lifetime. Once I started cutting notches on my hunting horn for each one that I killed, but I traded that horn off and I never bothered to cut notches on the other one.

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"Even when I was a young man, I never was one to frolic much. I used to go to dances, but somehow I never could get dance in my feet. In those days a wedding was really something to talk about. The merrymaking sometimes lasted for several days. They were different from most of the weddings now. In the old days, a boy asked a girl's father for her, then they had a big wedding to which the whole countryside were invited. But now a boy tells a girl, 'Let's try marriage and see if we like it'. Then they hop into an automobile, go to a preacher or more often a Justice of the Peace, and get married.

"My mother died when I was six days old and from then until I was six or seven years old, I went from one home to another living with whatever kind neighbor 4 was willing to keep me, for my father was 'jack of all trades'. My wife called him a 'piddler'. When I was eight years old my father went to Mississippi and took me with him. We lived there for two years and that is the only time that I ever went away from here. Since then I ain't never been on either a business nor a pleasure trip, ain't never had any desire to go away.

"I've been married twice. The first time I married Mary Mills. We had one son, but she only lived three years after we were married. After she died I stayed single six months and then married Alice Somerset. We had eight children, but we lost four of them when they were just babies.

"There was no school in this community, so I got no education. However, I think an education is a good thing to have, but it's not all. There's got to be a little work along with the education. I sent all my children to school long enough for them to learn to read and write their names, but none of them graduated. I needed them at home to help Alice and me with the work. They are all married now and have families of their own, but they live right here on my place - not one is too far away to hear me holler if I want him.

"I never owned an automobile and don't want one. If you were to bring the best automobile that's made and say, 'take it and drive it yourself', I'd say, 'much obliged but take it back'.

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"You know when I was a boy fourteen years old I helped my father build a 5 bank for a water mill. Of course I didn't get any pay, but then it did me good, for as long as a boy is working he's not likely to get in any trouble. The first job that I ever had for which I was paid was working in the turpentine woods.

"We own our own home and two hundred and sixty-five acres of land and we wouldn't sell any of it for any price, for we've got just enough land for each of the boys to have a nice home, and what on earth would they do with all those children and no land? My advice to any and everybody is to own a home for there's nothing like a place to call your own when you get old.

"You might not believe it, but during the past five years, I have only earned nine dollars and sixty cents in cash. The government gives me five dollars a month. With this I have to buy what few groceries I don't raise, tobacco and medicine. Somehow though I manage to save back some to pay doctor bills. The doctor is mighty good though. He knows I ain't got no money and he charges me accordingly. I never had but very few doctor bills to pay for the children, for they were all healthy, but my wife and myself have been sick a great deal. The nearest doctor lives fifteen miles away at McClellanville. One of my sons has an automobile though, and he takes us to the doctor when the need arises.

"We have it mighty tough now. I don't make any money and sometimes we 6 are in need of the necessities. If I could have an income of thirty dollars a month, I could live comfortably and have no worries.

"People these days do things just backwards, according to my opinion. They want to sleep all the morning and stay up all night, but old as I am I get up at daylight. Soon as I get up, I feed the mule, chickens, and my two cows, then about seven o'clock we have breakfast. After this I do whatever work I am able to do around the place, and at twelve o'clock we have dinner. Sometimes I take a rest after dinner. The remainder of the afternoon I piddle around doing first one thing and then another. About five o'clock I feed and water the

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stock. We have supper at six o'clock. If I'm not too tired I sit up until eight o'clock, but if I'm real tired I go to bed at dusk dark."